

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 24

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR  
10 March 1980

### The Monitor's view

# A world without SALT

The United States urgently needs to get back to SALT. Critics of the arms control treaty may be gleeful that it has been shelved in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. But the sad paradox is that, in a climate of heightened Soviet-US tension, an agreed-upon policy dealing with nuclear weapons becomes all the more important. It should not escape public attention that even the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, who have not been exactly lavish in their praise of SALT, are beginning to voice deep concern about the prospects of an unrestrained arms competition with the Soviet Union.

Can the US keep up with a Soviet buildup? What will this do to efforts to hold down the federal budget in a time of rising inflation? What will be the impact on the economy of pouring endless billions into its nonproductive sectors? If America cannot lift the economy out of the quagmire of inflation and low growth, how will this affect its ability to play a forceful role in the world — and meet the challenge of Soviet expansionist ambitions? Above all, what are the dangers of an unbridled arms race on global nuclear stability? These questions call for national discussion.

Far from punishing the Russians for their military gamble in Afghanistan, the postponement of SALT disservices the American interest. Here are some of the reasons why:

- Without a treaty, the Soviets will be under no constraints to hold down the number of nuclear weapons. According to the new National Intelligence Estimate, the most authoritative official estimate in the land, the Russians by 1985 could have as many as 14,000 nuclear warheads on their land-based missiles targeted on the US; under present plans, the US would have only a fraction of this. Under the SALT pact, the limit on the Russians would be 6,000 warheads.

The implications of this for the MX program alone are sobering. The US plans to spend \$33 billion (and much more, according to the General Accounting Office) to build some 4,500 shelters to protect 200 MX missiles, half of which it is thought would survive a Soviet attack. With 14,000 warheads, however, the Soviets could threaten all the shelters. To assure 50 percent survivability, the US would have to build four times as many shelters at a cost of up to \$70 billion.

This is not even to mention the skyrocketing price tag for more Trident missiles, air-launched cruise missiles, and other weaponry to keep pace with an accelerated Soviet buildup. Or — something little talked about — the costly crash program for nuclear plants which would be needed in order to produce sufficient plutonium for the weapons.

- Without SALT, American intelligence-gathering will be greatly complicated. One major achievement of the treaty is the prohibition against concealment so that each side can monitor compliance. What could happen is illustrated by the Soviet Union's recent test of a new submarine missile in which much of the performance data was radioed in code, preventing the US from fully analyzing the weapon. In the event SALT is not adopted, the Russians could encrypt the information on all their ICBM tests, making it more difficult for the US to learn the characteristics of Soviet missile systems.

- Many other efforts to curb the world's relentless arms race will be undermined. These include a comprehensive test-ban treaty, mutual and balanced force reductions in Europe, a ban on chemical radiological weapons, and talks on conventional arms transfers. Not least of all, without SALT, it will be virtually impossible to persuade non-nuclear states, such as Pakistan, not to build their own atomic arsenals. If the US and the USSR are unwilling to curb their appetites, the third-world nations will argue, why should they?

To bring these and other issues before the American public should be a high presidential priority, and we are happy to read that the administration is plotting a strategy for resumption of the Senate debate. It may seem futile, in the heat of the election campaign, to urge renewed consideration of the treaty. But the pact now races against time. It is a question whether the Russians would accept the treaty next year without extending its protocol (due to expire at the end of 1981) which provides controls on US cruise missiles; this would require further talks, a negotiation which would be further complicated by the issue of European-based nuclear weapons. Moreover, the Soviets could also logically ask to renegotiate the timetable for dismantling their old missiles.

As should be apparent by now to everyone, strategic arms control is a matter of global importance. It ought not to be made hostage to the vicissitudes of domestic politics. Helping the world avert a nuclear confrontation which an uncontrolled arms buildup might invite — and, contrary to George Bush, no nation could be deemed a winner in such a contest — is reason enough to throw all the nation's bipartisan energies into ratification of the treaty. Now that the enormous financial and economic costs of a world without SALT II also are becoming apparent, it is to be hoped the US military establishment will promote the pact as aggressively as it has pushed for bombers, aircraft carriers, and other projects. A loud and clear voice is needed to stop the nuclear arms madness.